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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 002257

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: TWO TEENAGERS HELD SINCE NOVEMBER 4
RELEASED

REF: TBILISI 002131

Classified B: Deputy Chief of Mission Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) Three Georgians youths were released by the South Ossetian de facto authorities on Saturday December 19th, including two teenagers detained on November 4th and one 16 year old boy detained in July (ref A). Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg met on December 17 with the de facto authorities in South Ossetia to secure their release. Hammarberg had previously negotiated with the de factos the week of November 29th, at which time two other Georgian teenagers were released. During that visit, Hammarberg announced his expectation that the two remaining teenagers would be released within ten days, or by December 12 (ref A).

¶2. (C) On December 18th, the European Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and OSCE reports indicated that the South Ossetian de factos had altered their previous position, stating on the 18th that the release of the two was never previously agreed. Unexpectedly, former Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli, who had returned from a recent high-profile trip to Moscow, met with de facto authorities in South Ossetia on December 17th and attended the hand over of the released prisoners. Noghaideli appeared at a press conference with de facto "president" Eduard Kokoity, Russian Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, and Hammarberg.

¶3. (C) Georgian political figures broadly welcomed the release of the Georgian teenagers but were skeptical of ex-PM Noghaideli's role in the process. Both majority and minority parliamentarians suggested that Noghaideli's involvement amounted to Russian control of the process, with some MPs asserting that it was an attempt to discredit the Georgian government in the eyes of the people.

BASS